COLE BLEASE GRAHAM [CBG]: This is Tape 16, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is February 2, 1983. Governor, what was the education system in South Carolina generally like before you became governor?

ROBERT E. McNAIR [REM]: Well, we'd been operating under the dual system where we had the totally segregated public school system. I came along at a time when we had begun to get into the integration of the public school system, first with the freedom of choice, and then the geographical assignments, and then the total integrated system. So we had to go from one to the other, which was a very dramatic and extreme change, and in some instances a very emotional change also.

CBG: If you think historically, what were some of the major developments or changes that started, let's say, with Governor [James F.] Byrnes and the sales tax?

REM: Well, going back there, we had had the two systems, really, a system for the whites and a system for the blacks. The system for the whites was well financed with adequate facilities and good financial support. The system for the blacks at that time had--we would have to acknowledge--totally inadequate facilities and inadequate support. Mr. Byrnes came along when we were still defending the “separate, but equal” system and focused on the equality side of it. It was a defense of segregation, but at the same time he determined that we had to equalize the educational opportunity and supported the sales tax committed totally to education. That was not only for improvement in the quality but in the physical facilities with the Educational Finance program and the transportation system that we had really not had before for blacks. You know, the whites would be bused, and we've all facetiously said we were busing many, many

years before busing became popular. We were busing the whites to the consolidated school, and the black children, of course, were walking to theirs, the little neighborhood schools with inadequate facilities and inadequate staff support and everything else.

So Mr. Byrnes came with a strong pitch for equalizing facilities and equalizing opportunity and used the sales tax for that purpose. We then set out to build good buildings. Most of those were built for the black children and to improve the black schools. The transportation system was extended to everybody everywhere with full state support, and that made it easier for people to get to and from school. Also, the funds for education were divided up among the counties on a per pupil basis so that it went where the student was and where the need was and not necessarily where the resources were. In the past they'd been almost totally dependent on the local property tax for their support, and the rural schools, of course, had minimal support because they had no industry and no strong tax base, whereas the industrialized part of the state or the more developed part had much stronger support.

This, in addition to equal opportunity for blacks as well as whites, was to equalize the financial support for children throughout South Carolina, a very strong program and a very good program and a very revolutionary program for South Carolina. We have since talked about the fact that we had a educational revolution in the fifties with the sales tax as we did an industrial revolution following that, and I think it was evident to everybody that emphasis on education made it a lot easier to develop and bring in industry. Once we indicated and demonstrated that we were going to do something about the quality of education in South Carolina, we were able to attract blue chip industry and to bring it in in

large numbers, and that, in turn, contributed more resources to further the support of education.

CBG: Was the debate on the sales tax in the General Assembly a heated one?

REM: Yes, it was because the sales tax was something new for us. There was some racism involved because a lot of that money was going to be spent to build good schools and to transport black children. So you had the racism issue involved in it at that time as well as people who just felt that we couldn't afford to put that kind of tax burden on everybody. The debate it generated was around primarily the fact that we were taxing people, as they said in the legislature, from conception to resurrection because a decision was made in the beginning that there would be few exclusions or exemptions from the sales tax. We determined that, if we were going to put it on and if we were going to accomplish what needed to be accomplished, that it ought to cover everything. So the battle was over whether to exclude food or medicines. We really didn't even exclude the burial services, caskets and all, because we felt we had to extend it broadly. Mr. Brynes, of course, conceived it, it was his program, he supported it very strongly. We have all felt that no one else other than a Jimmy Byrnes could have gotten this kind of a program through the legislature at this time.

CBG: Who were some of his major legislative supporters of the sales tax bill?

REM: Well, of course, he had Mr. [Soloman] Blatt, who was then the Speaker of the House, Senator [Edgar] Brown, who was the dean of the Senate.

CBG: Probably chair of Senate Finance.

REM: Senate Finance Committee chairman, and the solid support of all of the young members who came in at that time because most had run on a program that we had to do something about education and really needed to

face up to the issue. The big opposition really came from people who just opposed tax increases politically and wouldn't support it. There was also opposition to various parts of it that would come together in a coalition and make it awfully difficult.

In the distribution of the funds, there was a strong up state, lower state division over doing it on a per pupil basis and whether you did it on average daily attendance or whether you did it on enrollment because in the lower rural counties with heavy black population the average attendance was much lower than the enrollment. The argument for the sales tax was that everybody paid his fair share. If you were out there and you earned $1,000 a year, and you spent a $1,000, you paid it. If you earned a $100,000 and spent it, you paid it. So it was a fair way to really build a base in South Carolina and to do something, as we've said, revolutionary in education for state support.

The transportation system, which was all part of it as a package, was controversial for several reasons. We were going to transport everybody we hadn't been transporting before, so the racial issues were involved in that, but the big issue was the fact that we were going to use student drivers, and that was a very, very big issue in this state. People, you know, marched on the legislature, mothers came and appeared at public hearings because they didn't think it was safe to have a teenager driving a school bus with thirty-five or forty small children on it. So we had to overcome that hurdle. In fact, I was one of those who was very concerned and, coming from a rural county, strongly opposed to using the student driver to transport children. But statistics showed they were safer. Everywhere they had used this system they had a safety record far superior to the others. There was an argument, a valid argument, that the adult drivers generally were elderly people. Many of them had physical handicaps

and things like that. They couldn't work or weren't physically able to work, and yet I think the psychology of it was that they were still safer. Everybody was concerned about discipline.

So we had all the little problems surfacing, coming together, making it a very controversial program but one that had strong solid support. It had good support from the business community because they recognized what was happening. Mr. Byrnes, of course, gave it and brought strong support from the business community. Educational people were very solid in their support of it because again school teachers were going to benefit. It was the first time we were really going to have a real good, strong state aid for school teacher program where the state was taking on the primary responsibility for public education.

CBG: Were there changes in the organization of school districts to reflect . . .

REM: Substantial changes, yes. The commission that was created to implement the construction program had broad power and authority, and they set some guidelines about the size of schools and various other criteria that had to be met, rather rigid, because there wasn't enough money to build a building in every school district. I don't know how many school districts we had, well over a thousand school districts in the state, and when we got through, I think we ended up with around a hundred school districts. They forced consolidation. They forced consolidation of schools and they established the transportation system and the routes and where and how they would pick up so that you didn't run up to everybody's house and pick up children. They established distances, you know, that you had to walk to get to a main route and all. So it was extremely well planned and well thought out.

Dr. Ryan Crow from Sumter, who had been head of the Sumter school system, headed up the commission. The commission had some extremely strong, well-known, respected, firm, thick-skinned members on it. J. C. Long, former U.S. attorney, a very outstanding, controversial-type person, but a very crusty thick-skinned one, was chairman of it. He was just a strong supporter of Mr. Byrnes and had a strong commitment to doing something, to seeing this program through. With that kind of support, that commission really took the heat and took the heat off the legislature because they did it and created an atmosphere in which a lot of things began to happen.

You know, it was such that people tried to intervene, legislators tried to pass bills to undo what they had done. I think the biggest continuing controversy we had was over the Ruby schools in Chesterfield County because they kept wanting to pass legislation not letting them consolidate Ruby, which was an extremely small school district. The political leaders there were very adamant about it, and it continued on for years afterwards. But by and large, there was a very good, I think, acceptance of it, as you look back, though there was controversy, and it really become the foundation upon which the whole educational system in this state was built and has served us well.

CBG: What was the impact of the *Brown* decision in 1954?

REM: Well, that came as we were into this program. We were implementing it, and when that came, of course, that did away with the "separate, but equal doctrine." Fortunately, we had started this program, quite frankly, politically, because we could never have implemented this program after the *Brown* decision without an awful lot more controversy, I think. It would have been long delayed, and I think this state would probably be ten, fifteen, twenty years even behind where it is today, but it seemed that

fortune was on our side, that this sales tax, school construction, school transportation program, all was in place and actually far along in implementation when that decision came. So that as we moved toward the unified school system, we discovered that we had built all of these nice, fine, modern schools in the area serving the black children, and many of them became the school--as we integrated--they became the school or the surviving school. The transportation system was in place so all we had to do was to bring it together, which was rather simple, and thus we moved forward with the same program, only working towards one system, not two.

CBG: A lot was made out of that phrase, "with all deliberate speed," in that first . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: . . . Brown decision. Was that talked about much?

REM: Oh, yes, it was. That was the thing everybody caught a hold of. I think most people felt at that time that "with all deliberate speed" was sort of like we've taken a hundred years to get where we are, and it'll take us another hundred years to get from where we are to where we ought to be and this will be a very slow, gradual process. Of course, as you know, we had just the stalwart opposition to ever doing it, regardless, almost to seceding, you know, the interposition resolutions, the total opposition, the creation of the private school program, the closings almost. There was strong support, fortunately not in numbers, but strong vocal support just to close the public school system, and we all had to stand up to that. We had a constitutional mandate to maintain a free public school system for all children, and that we had to do, but committees were formed to try and conceive ways to avoid the problem as well as to delay it. I suppose, as we look back, it was a very trying period in the life and history of the

state, a very difficult period politically and socially and every other way and particularly in education.

CBG: Did you take a position or campaign on education as an issue when you ran for lieutenant governor?

REM: Yes. I have always felt and I've probably touched on this--coming from a rural community and having attended the small, two-teacher grade school and then going to the consolidated high school, that there just had to be a good strong program for South Carolina and that the state of South Carolina had that obligation, and it should be its primary function to provide for the educational needs. I did not feel that the local communities could or should have a major responsibility for the financial support of public education, and therefore we had to move toward that for several reasons. One is the educational level in the state was so low. The quality was not uniform throughout the state. There were too many dropping out and there was no remedial--we talked about remedial education, but we really didn't have remedial education in the school system that was of any quality of all. We thought we were preparing everybody to go to college, but we really weren't preparing them for that because we didn't have the curriculum to really get people ready for it. But it was designed to do that, and the vocational education program, in my opinion--and I think it was justified--was really not meeting the needs of South Carolina. There were just so many places that brick masonry and auto mechanics would lead to a job. And that's basically what we had, cosmetology for the females and brick masonry and auto mechanics was about it for the male children.

So I had come with a strong commitment to education. I had seen the benefits of a good program with my father as chairman of the consolidated board of trustees in Macedonia where I thought we had, with limited

resources, as good a faculty as you could find anywhere, and I thought I benefited from that. Now we had the basics. We didn't have the frills because we didn't have the funds to have the laboratories and all of that that you had in other places, but when it came to the basics, we got a good education. And then going on to Allendale, which again was a rural county, a small county, we saw the effects of bringing together into one district, one consolidated school program, and again with progressive enlightened leadership what you could accomplish there.

My feeling was that this is the base we had to build South Carolina on to really improve the quality of education, but also to reach more people, to retain more people. We had repealed the compulsory school attendance law when the *Brown* decision had come along. You know, we'd taken all of those kinds of steps, and I was committed to reinstituting a compulsory attendance law, and I recall my reason was that I didn't want to raise up another generation that we had to support through public welfare. It was a lot cheaper to educate them and find them a job and put them to work than it was to support them either on welfare or in the correction system, and people by and large would catch on to an idea like that.

CBG: Did you make many speeches around the state as lieutenant governor? Or how did you express your views on . . .

REM: Yes, I did. I probably did as much as anybody in a short period of time because, you know, I had developed a lot of friends. I had traveled, and Mr. [Donald] Russell, when he became governor, did what every governor has to do. He restricted his schedule and restricted his appearances and limited that pretty drastically. So I had the opportunity to speak at various functions, many statewide functions, and came in early with the educational community. It was a good opportunity to do it, and I don't recall making one that I didn't focus on education. I think that was the

main thrust of my feeling and my program, both then and on through the Governor's Office.

CBG: Governor Russell had a profound impact at least on the climate of integration in South Carolina. Could you describe the impact of Governor Russell on education and the feeling in South Carolina?

REM: You know, I've said over and over that we have been very lucky. If you'll look back, I don't know of anybody who could have done what Mr. Byrnes did to get that program in, the sales tax program and all of that, through the legislature and get it started and get it going as quickly as he did. Though it was done for another purpose, it just happened to be there and in place. Then we went through the period with Senator [Ernest] Hollings as governor, a young, aggressive, super salesman who really just went out and sold us, South Carolina, to industry all over the country and did a superior job of doing that and gearing up for industrial development.

CBG: Again at the right time.

REM: At the right time, with the public and everybody in the state needing it. And then comes Mr. Russell, who everybody acknowledges as one of the most brilliant men that we've produced in South Carolina, very intellectual, a deep thinker, totally committed to South Carolina and who had had the opportunity of serving as president of the university [of South Carolina] which, again, something that normally wouldn't happen, a unique opportunity to look inside of education in this state and really get a feel for what we needed and how critical it was that we not only focused on the public schools but on the higher education level.

So he became governor, and in addition to that, a man like Mr. Russell, with his background and his broad experience in Washington and internationally, brought dignity to the office and to the state at a time when we were moving into integrating public education. Mr. Russell very

deeply felt that we had to do this and very deeply felt that South Carolina should do it with dignity and was committed to that and never made the kind of inflammatory remarks or speeches, never did anything to create any emotional problem at all. I think, again, he was the right man at the right time to get us over that hurdle, and he took us over it so well and created such a good climate in the state. It would have been awfully bad, I've often said if we had had someone like some of our friends in neighboring states who had taken a position of opposition as we were confronted with the integration of the public school system following the integration of Clemson and the university.

CBG: How did Governor Russell come to choose his inauguration as--I believe it was the inauguration . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: The reception.

REM: I really . . .

CBG: Did you get real involved in that?

REM: You know, I really wasn't privy to all of that, but knowing Mr. Russell and all, there was a fellow--you know, most people look at you as what you are today, not where you came from and how you got where you are and realize the influence and impact that has on what you do--there was a fellow grown up in Mississippi, whose father had died at an early age, whose mother had moved to South Carolina and who had really struggled to rear him and to get him through public school and who had come to the university, as he says, I think, with just a few dollars in his pocket and a desire for an education, and who'd literally worked his way through school and had a deep feeling for people and an understanding of what it meant to live in poverty and to have to work to get an education. I think this was a part of Donald Russell that a lot of people didn't recognize

because they only saw him as Mr. Byrnes's number two man wherever he was, as an international person, a brilliant lawyer, not as the real Donald Russell.

I wasn't privy to all of that, but what he did was to choose to have an open inauguration and to have a barbecue at the governor's mansion and invite everybody, though he got some criticism from which he never recovered. I think that did more to set the tone really and create a climate in this state than any other single thing that happened if you look back on it.

CBG: One of those exercises in political symbolism.

REM: It was just an exercise that said to everybody that the opportunity is open now. You know, "you're invited to the barbecue on the mansion ground," and I think it spoke to the rest of the South and to the nation and to the world because it was well publicized. We got a lot of good reports around the country from that.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CBG: This is Tape 16, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is February 2, 1983. Governor, when you became governor in your own right, what were your ambitions, your thoughts, your plan, for the development of South Carolina education?

REM: Well, of course, I felt we had to really build on what we had been doing and had developed over a period of time plus the strong feeling that we had to have another big movement of some kind, that we had gone along about as far as we could go with this program and that we needed something

broader, and that we really had to take a look at the whole educational system and determine how we could do that. We recognized that, though we'd come a long way, we still had too many dropouts, and it all was traced back to, you know, that they dropped out in the early stages because they just weren't ready for it. We did not have, again, the remedial--what later we called an adjunct education program. We had not focused on adults to any great extent, and there was just such a large number of people out there of employable age who had less than a high school education. Somehow we had to get those people into the labor market because the kinds of industry we were getting at that time were putting a high school diploma as a requirement.

We also realized that the level of higher education had sort of been neglected and that we just had to get on with that. I had developed again over a period the strong conviction that higher education had to get more involved, and it had to really come back in, and through it were we going to build South Carolina. We sort of started at both ends, at the lower end and at the higher level. Medical education was really a problem, totally inadequate. The Medical University was on the verge of losing its accreditation. They weren't turning out enough doctors. The ones they were turning out we were losing someplace else and not getting them back. So we just had, you know, a whole big problem to deal with. Vocational education was totally inadequate and just frankly was not meeting the need of the state. Technical education was starting but was moving too slowly. My feeling was we just had to have a, what later became--and it wasn't my word--sort of a quantum leap forward again, both in volume as well as in quality. We just have to move.

CBG: Did you launch this program during the short term, or did you wait until . . .

REM: Did not. During the short term we really more or less stayed with what was in place because I only had a couple of years to go through. In one year the budget was pretty much in place in the legislature. The next one was to sort of hold the line, keep things in place. There wasn't a lot of money anyway. I knew we had to look for some new sources of revenue if we were going to accomplish what we needed to accomplish. So it was really to sort of hold things in place, to pull people together, to get folks to talking, to get involvement from different people who we felt could contribute to the development of the program. So we began to pull them together, to start talking about what needed to be done, and to start talking about how we would pull the educational leaders in. Of course, we met regularly to talk about the integration of the school system and how that was moving and to communicate with them and primarily then how we could get on with some kind of a major program to do things for education in the state.

CBG: Do you recall some of the people with whom you sat and talked, some of the leaders?

REM: Well, yes, we talked. We had a group that was ready-made for something like this. Guy Varne here in the city of Columbia, who was sort of the dean of public education, along with J. Ryan Crow from Sumter had put together what he referred to as the “Dirty Dozen.” It was thirteen of the superintendents of the larger school systems in the state, and they met regularly. So I used that and started meeting with them for breakfast on a regular basis. That was a very invaluable thing because I'd sit and listen to them talk about what the problems were and what really the needs were and where we needed to establish our priorities and sort of used that as the base. Then I added a couple of superintendents from rural or small counties like Henry White, who was superintendent down in Allendale. He

was head of that county school system and a very progressive and outstanding person, and the superintendent from over in Clarendon County. I brought him in because he was, you know, very, very strong and well respected. So we brought groups like that together where we talked about education in the state and what really needed to be done, where the weaknesses were. We began to meet with and have regular sessions with the teachers. Whoever was president of the state Classroom Teachers Association became a very integral part of this, and I recall meeting regularly to get input from there. I was always impressed with the fact that those people put salary, you know, not number one on the priority list. They put classroom size, tools to teach with, and things like that ahead of salary. It impressed me enough to recognize the real sincerity of the teachers in this state insofar as improving the quality of education. And we'd bring those in.

The Association of School Boards was active then, and they had a lot of strong people involved. So they would pull in and began to talk from the school board point of view and from this came, you know, people that represented every part of it. It always impressed me how when you sat around and talked to them, you'd have your priorities--maybe five high priority items--those five would be on everybody's list. There may be a little change in the order of priority for some reason, but basically you would find that they all focused in the same areas, and all of it was money. You had to acknowledge in that period of time that it was basically the dollars to do some of these things, and then with time we began to figure how can we maximize the use of those dollars because my position was that money wasn’t going to cure it. We had to be sure to do things as reorganize and get our program in order so that the dollars go to the right place, and we can see the kinds of results we want from them.

The university, Clemson, you know, everybody began to come into the act. Then the business community, we'd pull them in, the John Cauthens and folks like that, into sessions. I would have meetings with the leadership in industry, the textile people, talking about their impact and their influence and what they could contribute and what they could do and what it meant to them. So I think I used that period in there to try to pull people together, to get some things done, to get the compulsory school attendance law back on the books. Though it was put on in a graduated way, at least we got it back, to get people back in the schools, to get things like that sort of in place for us.

CBG: Do these major groups in education and perhaps others really elect a superintendent of education, or is that really a more free-wheeling process?

REM: Well, at that time and I think even now, yes, they do.

CBG: Or at least have a potent influence.

REM: They have a very strong influence, and it surfaced there because Dr. Jesse Anderson, who'd been the superintendent for a long time, was retiring, and we felt we had to have somebody who could really provide 1eadership, who the school people had confidence in, who had demonstrated that he was strong enough and good enough to really help accomplish this, who we'd worked with and ran through. We sat around and talked about it, and they talked about it, and frankly Cyril Busbee--it was one of the few times I know when they all sat around and said pros and cons and everywhere and if Cyril runs, we're going to support him.

Cyril Busbee ran, he ran with the strong support, and was an ideal person. Cyril was a good, tough fellow, an articulate fellow, and he had the support and confidence of the school people and really did an outstanding job. In that group were a number of people who were talked

about. Gordon Garrett, who was superintendent in Charleston, was one that I always relied on heavily, Joe McCracken up in Spartanburg, who's just retired, along with Curry McArthur, who was over at Sumter. Any one of them would have made an outstanding one, but for reasons it all surfaced with Cyril Busbee. School people really were responsible for Cyril, and they supported him very strongly and supported him throughout his tenure.

CBG: What was it like, then, being governor with a strong superintendent of education? Did he come with programs to you, or did you take ideas to him or was it a two-way?

REM: It was a two-way, and I suppose we had as good a working relationship as anybody's ever had in those two positions because he was a member of that committee, and we had been working together. He'd had input, and we had constant communications, personal communications, constant dialogue, meetings. We sat down and talked. In the beginning, we started doing things with some of the limited resources we had. When we'd sit with a budget, we started then, and we were able to get the board and others to agree that we would allocate what we could to education, and then we'd break it down, and for what was for public education we'd then call in Dr. Busbee and say, “Here is $10 million that we can use, that we've allocated from the funds for next year. You go back, you get your people together and come back to us with a recommendation of where this money goes.”

That gave them that input plus it forced them to do something they hadn't been doing before. It forced them to step up to the table and defend the use of those funds. They could say, “We don't have enough,” but that's all that was available, and they would defend where that money went because they had input into it. They would sit down and do it. There was always the controversy with the schoolteachers wanting more, but by and large the teachers also would support it because they had been involved,

they had had input into the determination of how those funds that we would allocate would be allocated in the public school system.

We would start doing the same thing at the college and university level, though to a lesser degree, because it was impossible to do it there, although we did determine early that we had to do something for graduate education. We decided just arbitrarily as a beginning to allocate x dollars per graduate student per year in addition to whatever your budget was. I think we started with a couple hundred dollars per student per year and moved that on up. We recognized that graduate education cost more, but we also recognized its importance, and that was the way we let people know we were going to do some things at the graduate level.

CBG: Was it a general concern for education, for federal funds, and for cooperation between the states that led to this compact of the states?

REM: Yes. The federal funds in the beginning, in the fifties and early sixties--we had sort of taken the official position that we didn't want it and wouldn't take it because federal funds led to federal involvement and to federal controls. So we had said no. Of course, when I came along, with integration a reality and federal funds becoming such a big factor, we determined we would not only take it, but we'd take all we could get and more, too, you know, in the form of trying to devise, as we've said, demonstration programs and projects and all of that, because we needed that money to accomplish and to make the system work and to make integration work. At that time and prior to then, again partly because of segregation in the South, we had the old system where, if someone wanted to go to forestry school and we didn't have a school of forestry, we had a working arrangement with Auburn or Georgia, where they could go there. We had also had it with the black students. If they wanted to go to medical school, they could go to Meharry [Medical College, Nashville] or somewhere, and the

state would support that and pay for it just through those working agreements. I think that sort of led on into where we recognized that we had to begin to do things on a regional basis, and that's where the Southern Regional Education Board came into being. We were able to get together, accomplish more, we could utilize federal funds, we could use endowment monies, which were then available. Really, we were given priority in the South in the use of endowment funds. I think the endowments felt reluctant to give it to South Carolina or Mississippi, but they were more inclined to give it to the SREB or to some group like that that they had confidence in and knew really were motivated to do the right thing with it.

CBG: Did South Carolina take a leadership role in the compact and . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: . . . in the board?

REM: Yes, we did. We took a very strong leadership role in it. In fact, I served as chairman during my time of both the Southern Regional Education Board and of the Education Commission of the States, which came as a result of Dr. [James] Conant's book and Terry Sanford's Storm Over the States. The two got together and formed this Education Commission of the States that really turned out to be a very, very good thing because it brought together the educational, political, and business leadership of the states, representatives from those groups, and brought them together at a national level where you sat around and talked about education and the needs and what others were doing and how they were doing it. That in itself was a very worthwhile thing, but it gave you exposure to the nationally-known figures in education.

Well, we began to think about kindergartens. You had the Carnegie Foundation, and I had gotten to know them extremely well and gotten to be

friendly, serving on committees with them. They had a big influence on me in South Carolina and through them we were able to get a grant to set up the first pilot program in the state to conduct a seminar and a training program for teachers. Joan Cooney [Joan Ganz Cooney, a leading force behind the Children's Television Workshop] became a friend, and I served on a couple of national committees with her and learned what they were doing in Sesame Street. Dr. White, from up at Harvard, who'd written a book on early childhood education--we had the opportunity of sitting on committees and listening to him and others talk about preschool education, and we were able to get them down here to talk to. To me just that exposure was worth more than the time and expense it took to be involved.

We, also, were able to develop consortium-type programs, cooperative programs. Again the foundations would support those kinds of programs more than they would direct, and you could be a demonstration program. We were able to really tackle the accreditation society, and that was just one of the biggest obstacles to education because it was a closed shop, a group of educators who were sort of self-appointed and self-anointed and, in my judgment, put up barriers to education rather than improvements and quality. Well, with the Education Commission of the States, where you had the leadership, political and educational and community business leadership, you were able to get at some of their archaic modes of operation and some of their empire-building operations. I recall taking the Southern, whatever it was, Education Accreditation society on a couple of times and, by having developed a friendship with Dr. Andy Holt at the University of Tennessee--he was then president of it--he knew me and knew what I was trying to do. So we were able to take them on and really win a few battles, and, I thought, accomplish a great deal in South Carolina.

CBG: Did you ever get the feeling that people were flabbergasted at a

Deep South state governor circulating in Harvard and Carnegie Association circles talking about improving the quality of education?

REM: Well, again, you know, we'd had Terry Sanford, who had come along early, who had been a forerunner, and Terry was out front. I think they were kind of looking for somebody else to come along because we'd had the George Wallaces and the others like that and then came Carl Sanders from Georgia and Hulett Smith from West Virginia, and, you know, some of us like that who really wanted to get involved. It was something they had been looking for and sort of anticipating and welcomed more than anything else, and what we found was an acceptance. Yes, maybe we were a little strange. So they gave us more opportunity, moved us forward more, and gave us opportunities to participate, but I think it was interesting to them when you sat around the table and the people from Harvard and the people from the Carnegie Foundation or any of those sat, it was a little strange to begin to hear this kind of thing from some of us down here.

CBG: Did the legislature or the press have any idea what was going on?

REM: I think so. We involved the legislative leaders. Harold Breazeale, who was chairman of the House Education Committee, became very active nationally and attended all the conferences. We had some from over in the Senate, and all of those got active. I'm not sure they fully comprehended. I was a good one for inviting the press along, and I can recall taking Levona Page--actually holding her a seat on the plane and taking her to conferences because she was very good then and very interested in all of this that was going on. Others we would invite, and we'd make arrangements for them to fly with us to some of these conferences to see.

I think they were probably more conscious because of our meeting with and the briefing of the editorial writers and all which contributed a lot because we talked about things like this, and they were generally

knowledgeable. I used to also take them. I'd take Harrison Jenkins with me occasionally when I was going, or Bill Workman was a great one for attending sessions and always wanted to know what was going on. We would invite Tom Waring. Probably the most involved fellow was the editor of the Greenville News at that time who was just extremely active in everything that was going on in the state. He was a real leader and supporter and out front and they contributed a lot.

CBG: We were talking a moment ago about the foundation grant to study public kindergartens? How did South Carolina come to get a public kindergarten?

REM: Well, the statistics showed that the dropout rate in the first three grades was tremendous. The repeater rate was terrific, and the studies that were made demonstrated that, with a preschool or kindergarten program, if you followed the trends, you ought to reduce the repeater rate by a certain percentage, and if you did that, you would more than pay for the kindergarten program. Actually, it was a money-saving thing. After I had been elected to the full four-year term, we really tried to do something and brought in Moody's and Campus Facilities Associates, the educational study group, to take a look at us and to work with us and develop what became the Moody Report. A high priority was preschool and kindergarten. They went through the numbers and talked about the repeater rate, the dropouts along the way, the lack of adjunct education or remedial education, the need for all of these, the need for adult literacy. All of this was built into that report, and we put kindergarten as a high priority because we felt we really had to have one.

That in itself was controversial because kindergartens were then controversial. There were two schools of thought. You know, there were the experts who said a child started his learning process early and so much

of it was completed by the time he got to the first grade. You ought to start with them when they were three-year-olds and all of that. We looked at everywhere everybody had been and concluded that South Carolina had to have a kindergarten program and that we really had to have it where we didn't have them. Unfortunately, the ones who were already exposed to it were the ones who didn't need it. They were just going that much further ahead and creating that much more problem, and we needed the one primarily for the children coming from the low income families and from the rural areas who weren't exposed to the environment that kids in the city were exposed to, and, therefore, we had to have a state-supported kindergarten program.

CBG: Had the issue of race as far as public kindergartens evaporated by this time?

REM: No, it had not, and that was a very big issue, “My little granddaughter sitting in there with you know and at that tender age” and all of this sort of thing.

CBG: Not getting a quality education.

REM: Not getting a quality education, and it really was a key issue, and we had filibusters. I think the biggest filibuster we had in the legislature was not over the increase in sales tax or the increase or revamping of the income tax. We did have some on the beer and the wine and the cigarette, as you always get, but the strongest filibuster, and the biggest fight was over the compulsory school attendance law and the kindergartens because that was right at the heart of the whole thing, and we had to weather that. We had to work real hard. I mean, it was an all-out effort to get those programs through and keep them intact.

CBG: Was the black/white argument up front?

REM: Some of it was up front, but it certainly was a cloak room argument. It certainly was out there. I remember, when I was running for election, people reminded me and some of the polls showed that my biggest problem was with the mothers of school-age children, particularly at the elementary level because they identified me with integration and the fact that I was there out front forcing their children to go to school together and in the younger ages.

But again, we had such strong support from the educational communities. School teachers were really out front on the need for kindergarten. I haven't mentioned one group, which surfaced the other day, that was sort of a forerunner and a bringing together, the Christian Action Council. We don't hear much about it today, but Howard McClain sort of brought that thing along. I can remember when I first became governor being invited to come over and have lunch and speak to the Christian Action Council. It met in the basement over at Trinity Church. That was the only place they could meet and have lunch, and it was a sensitive thing about whether you go or don't go. I went as the lieutenant governor and addressed them at the invitation of Howard McClain and probably Wright Spears, but groups like that really came forward and put strong support behind an effort like this.

END OF TAPE